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Khamenei accuses Trump of inciting deadly protests

• Iranian leader calls US president 'criminal'; blames Israel for causing chaos, violence • Internet partially back after 200-hour nationwide blackout • Intelligence raids capture 'ringleaders' tied to exiled prince

DUBAI: Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei on Saturday blamed President Donald Trump for weeks of demonstrations that rights groups say have led to more than 3,000 deaths, calling the American leader a criminal for the ensuing casualties.

The protests, described as Iran's worst unrest in years, erupted Dec 28 over economic hardship before swelling into widespread demonstrations calling for the end of clerical rule in the Islamic Republic.

"We consider the US president criminal for the casualties, damages and slander he inflicted on the Iranian nation," Khamenei said, according to Iranian state media.

While Trump has repeatedly threatened to intervene, warning of "very strong action" if Iran executed protesters, he took to social media on Friday to thank Tehran's leaders for purportedly calling off mass hangings. Iranian officials have stated there was "no plan to hang people."

In comments seemingly responding to Trump, Khamenei said, "We will not drag the country into war, but we will not let domestic or international criminals go unpunished."

Khamenei, the country's ultimate authority, acknowledged that "several thousand deaths" had occurred during the crackdowns. He accused Iran's longtime enemies, the US and Israel, of organising violence, starting fires, destroying public property and inciting chaos.

"Those linked to Israel and the US caused massive damage and killed several thousand," Khamenei said, adding that they had "committed crimes and a grave slander."

The US-based Human Rights Activists News Agency (HRANA) said it had verified 3,090 deaths, including 2,885 protesters, and more than 22,000 arrests.

Last week, Iran's prosecutor general, Mohammad Movahedi Azad, said detainees would face investigations conducted "without leniency, mercy or tolerance".

"All perpetrators are mohareb," state media quoted Azad as saying. Mohareb is an Islamic legal term meaning to wage war against God and is punishable by death under Iranian law. Azad said those held included people who "aided rioters and terrorists attacking security forces and public property" and "mercenaries who took up arms and spread fear among citizens".

Information flow has been complicated by internet blackouts, though residents and state media reported Saturday that services were partially restored.

"Metrics show a very slight rise in internet connectivity in #Iran this morning" after a 200-hour shutdown, the internet monitoring group NetBlocks posted on the social platform X.

The group noted that connectivity remained around 2 per cent of ordinary levels.

The semi-official *Mehr* news agency reported that internet service had been restored for some users, while the *ISNA* news website said SMS service had also been reactivated.

A resident of Karaj, west of Tehran, said by phone via WhatsApp that he noticed the internet return at 4am Saturday.

The resident, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said Karaj experienced severe violence, with Thursday being the peak of the unrest.

State media has reported the arrest of thousands of "rioters and terrorists" across the country following "complex intelligence operations." These included people allegedly linked to opposition groups abroad.

Reports identified one detainee as Nazanin Baradaran, whom state media described as a ringleader operating under the pseudonym "Raha Parham" on behalf of Reza Pahlavi, the exiled son of Iran's last shah. Reuters could not independently verify the report or her identity.

Pahlavi has positioned himself as a potential leader should the regime collapse and has advocated for re-establishing diplomatic ties with Israel.

Israeli Heritage Minister Amichai Eliyahu said in a recent interview with Israel's *Army Radio* that Israel had operatives "on the ground" aiming to weaken Iran's capabilities, though he denied they were working directly to topple the leadership.—Reuters

TRAFFIC moves through dense fog after snowfall near the Police Lines in Skardu on Saturday.—Photo by the writer

Low snowfall leaves GB mountains bare

Experts warn 'snow drought' could worsen flood risk downstream

By Jamil Nagri

GILGIT: Climate change impacts are becoming increasingly visible in Gilgit-Baltistan, where below-normal snowfall has left much of the region unusually dry this winter.

Light snowfall was recorded in parts of Skardu, Kharmang, Shigar, Ghanche, Astore and Ghizer on Friday and Saturday. The Pakistan Meteorological Department (PMD) has forecast further rain and snowfall in several areas until Jan 23.

Officials said Skardu received about two to three inches of snow on Saturday, while parts of Ghizer saw intermittent snowfall over the past two days.

Light snow was also reported in Hunza, Nagar and other areas last week, but residents said most valleys remained dry, with mountains largely bare and rocky.

Muhammad Ali Alam, a resident of Skardu, said the region typically received heavy snowfall by mid-January. "The mountains should be snow-clad by now, but the first snow of the season in Skardu and adjoining areas only fell on Friday," he told *Dawn*. He said residents had observed later and lower snowfall over the past two years.

Karim Hayat, a resident of Hussaini village in Upper Hunza's Gojal valley, said snowfall usually began in late November.

"It is alarming that we are facing a snow drought till January," he said, adding that the light snow on surrounding peaks would melt quickly in the sun. He also said temperatures remained unusually high until the end of December.

Saeed Farooqi from the Tirashig area of Astore said the district would normally be blanketed in snow by this time. "This year, the area remained dry through January," he said.

Experts said a shift in winter patterns had been observed across GB in recent years, with snowfall starting later, the areas receiving less snow and temperatures remaining higher than usual.

Gilgit-Baltistan Environmental Protection Agency (GBEPA) Director Khadim Hussain told *Dawn* the region's fragile ecosystem was being disturbed by climate change and environmental degradation.

He said snowfall had increasingly shifted to mid-January and February, reducing the chance of snow compacting and turning into ice on mountains and glaciers.

"Late snowfall does not compact and can melt rapidly when the summer season starts, which increases the risk of floods downstream," he said.

Mr Hussain said climate change was a major driver of the shift, but local factors were also contributing. He cited deforestation, unplanned construction of roads and other infrastructure, the influx of tourism and increasing human activity near glaciers.

"Greenhouse emissions, increasing traffic discharge emissions in the fragile environment, human settlements near glaciers, burning of tyres, animal dung and cutting of forests for firewood impacted glaciated areas," he said.

He said uncontrolled population and increasing human activities in environmentally sensitive areas also contributed to the weather pattern change in the area.

Citing data collected by GBEPA, he said the average temperature in GB rose by about 0.6 degrees Celsius between 1987 and 2013. He said the region had faced a rise in flash floods, accelerated glacial melt and other climate-linked hazards in recent years.

US judge reins in federal agents in Minnesota

WASHINGTON: A US judge on Friday restricted federal agents from interfering with peaceful protesters in Minnesota, ordering immigration agents to dial back aggressive tactics shortly after President Donald Trump said there was no immediate need to invoke the Insurrection Act regarding the demonstrations.

US District Judge Katherine Menendez barred the detention or arrest of peaceful protesters and drivers, as well as the use of pepper spray against demonstrators.

The 83-page order gives the Department of Homeland Security's current operation in the northern US city 72 hours to come into compliance.

The ruling follows two incidents in which federal agents opened fire, killing one person and wounding another in the span of a week.

In a separate move potentially inflaming the standoff between the White House and Minnesota officials, *CBS News* reported that the Justice Department is investigating Minnesota Gov Tim Walz and Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey for impeding federal officers.

Both Democrats have called for peaceful protests against immigration sweeps in their state.

"This is an obvious attempt to intimidate me for standing up for Minneapolis, local law enforcement, and residents against the chaos and danger this Administration has brought to our city," Frey wrote on X on Friday.

Walz noted that the Trump administration has moved to investigate other Democrats who have opposed the president's policies. He pointed to the Jan 7 fatal shooting of Renee Good, a 37-year-old woman, by an Immigration and Customs Enforcement officer in Minneapolis.

"The only person not being investigated for the shooting of Renee Good is the federal agent who shot her," Walz wrote on X. —Agencies

In call with Araghchi, Dar hopes for peace in Iran

Dawn Report

ISLAMABAD: Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar expressed his hope for peace and stability in Iran on Saturday during a telephonic conversation with his Iranian counterpart, Abbas Araghchi, as anti-government protests in the neighbouring country have subsided in recent days, apparently easing tensions with the US and reducing fears of a broader regional military conflict.

According to a post by the Foreign Office on X, Mr Dar and Mr Araghchi spoke on the phone, during which the two diplomats discussed the current situation in Iran and the wider region.

Mr Dar, who is also the deputy prime minister, "expressed hope for peace and stability, and both sides agreed to continue bilateral consultations on matters of mutual interest", the statement added.

On Thursday, Pakistan had expressed hope at the United Nations Security Council for an early normalisation of the situation in Iran, which saw its largest demonstrations in years, challenging the country's government.

Ambassador Asim Ahmad described Iran as a "brotherly country", saying that the people of the two nations share deep-rooted historical, friendly, cultural and religious bonds.

Protests have taken place across Iran in a movement sparked by anger over the rising cost of living, leading to authorities imposing internet restrictions.

US President Donald Trump had repeatedly threatened to intervene in support of protesters. However, monitors reported that the protests have subsided after a crackdown by security forces, while Trump declared that he had decided not to attack the country.

Meanwhile, on the same day, FO spokesperson Tahir Andrabi said that instability in Iran did not suit Pakistan, underscoring that calm and stability in the neighbouring country were directly linked to Islamabad's own interests.

He also said that Pakistan was engaging with US on the issue of tariffs being imposed on countries conducting trade with Iran.

UN treaty to protect 30pc of oceans by 2030 takes effect

• The agreement envisages creation of 'marine protected areas' in hitherto unregulated waters • 80 countries have ratified it; US yet to do so

SINGAPORE: A landmark global treaty to safeguard biodiversity in the high seas came into effect on Saturday, providing countries with a legally binding framework to tackle threats such as overfishing and meet a target to protect 30 per cent of the ocean environment by 2030.

The UN treaty, also known as Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ), was finalised in March 2023 after 15 years of negotiations, and will allow the creation of a global network of "marine protected areas" in vast and previously unregulated ocean ecosystems lying in international waters.

"It's two-thirds of the ocean, (and) it's half the surface of the planet that for the first time will have a comprehensive legal regime," Adam McCarthy, an official at the Australian foreign ministry and co-chair of the treaty's preparatory committee, told a media briefing.

The treaty reached the threshold of 60 national ratifications on Sept 19 last year, meaning that it would go formally into operation within 120 days. The number of ratifications has since risen to more than 80, with China, Brazil and Japan adding their names to the list.

Others, including Britain and Australia, are expected to follow soon. The United States signed the treaty during the previous administration, but has not yet ratified it.

"Whilst we only needed 60 for it to enter into force, obviously it's really critical for its implementation and for it to be as effective as possible for us to achieve global or universal ratification of the treaty," said Rebecca Hubbard, director of the High Seas Alliance, a coalition of environmental groups.

Under the treaty, countries must conduct environmental assessments of activities that have an impact on ocean ecology. It will also create mechanisms allowing nations to share spoils of the "blue economy", including "marine genetic resources" used in industries such as biotechnology.

'30 by 30 target'

Environmentalists say more than 190,000 protected areas would need to be established in order to meet the "30 by 30" target to bring 30pc of the oceans under formal protection by 2030. Currently, only about eight per cent, or 29 million square kilometres (11.2 million square miles), is protected.

But the treaty will have little impact on what some conservationists identify as one of the greatest threats facing the marine environment — the clamour to extract mineral resources from the ocean bed.—Reuters

Trump threatens allies with tariffs to force Greenland sale

• Duties start at 10pc on eight nations from Feb 1 and could rise to 25pc in June; penalties to remain until deal is complete • Denmark, UK, France and Germany among nations targeted; thousands rally in Nuuk as PM joins chants of 'Make America Go Away' • US lawmakers call govt push 'misguided'

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump escalated his bid to acquire Greenland on Saturday, threatening tariffs of up to 25 per cent on eight European nations until his purchase of the Danish territory is achieved.

Trump aimed the threat at Denmark and fellow NATO members who have deployed troops to the mineral-rich territory in recent days. The ultimatum threatens to create unprecedented tension within the alliance.

Writing on his Truth Social platform, Trump announced that starting Feb 1, all goods sent to the United States from Denmark, Norway, Sweden, France, Germany, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Finland would be subject to a 10 per cent tariff.

"On June 1st, 2026, the Tariff will be increased to 25pc. This Tariff will be due and payable until such time as a deal is reached for the Complete and Total purchase of Greenland," Trump wrote.

The US president argued that the European nations are "playing this very dangerous game" and have introduced unsustainable risks.

"Therefore, it is imperative that, in order to protect Global Peace and Security, strong measures be taken so that this potentially perilous situation end quickly, and without question," he added.

It was not immediately clear what legal authority the president would invoke to impose the levies. Since returning to office, Trump has frequently utilised sweeping tariffs to combat what the administration labels unfair trade practices and to press foreign governments on US interests.

The president has repeatedly claimed the US "needs" Greenland for national security reasons and that Denmark is incapable of ensuring the defence of the island, which is home to 57,000 people and sits at the strategic gateway to the Arctic.

European NATO members recently deployed troops to Greenland for military exercises. France stated the mission was designed to demonstrate a commitment to defending the territory. Denmark confirmed the US had been invited to participate in those exercises.

Trump characterised the resistance from European allies as a threat to global stability, warning that the nations opposing the deal "have put a level of risk in play that is not tenable or sustainable."

Protests in the Arctic

Trump's announcement coincided with mass demonstrations on Saturday in Greenland's capital, Nuuk, and across Denmark. Thousands of protesters joined Greenlandic Prime Minister Jens-Frederik Nielsen in Nuuk, waving flags and chanting slogans under light rain.

Many demonstrators wore caps reading "Make America Go Away" — a play on Trump's "Make America Great Again" campaign slogan.

"We don't want Trump invading Greenland, that is the message," said Paarniq Larsen Strum, a 44-year-old nurse at the rally. She described the geopolitical stand-off as "nerve-wracking."

Opposition to the US annexation plan is widespread among residents. A poll published in January 2025 showed 85pc of Greenlanders oppose joining the United States, with only 6pc in favour.

"We demand respect for our country's right to self-determination and for us as a people," said Avijaja Rosing-Olsen, an organiser of the demonstration. "This is not only our struggle, it is a struggle that concerns the entire world."

The situation spurred groups like Uagut, an association of Greenlanders in Denmark, to mobilise. Organisers said their aim was "to send a clear and unified message of respect for Greenland's democracy and fundamental human rights". In a display of cultural unity, demonstrators chanted traditional Inuit songs, rejecting the view of their homeland as merely a strategic asset to be bought or sold.

Allies push back

In Copenhagen, protesters showed solidarity, waving Danish and Greenlandic flags and chanting "Kalaallit Nunaat", the island's name in Greenlandic.

"You cannot be bullied by an ally. It's about international law," said Kirsten Hjoernholm, a 52-year-old charity worker at the protest.

Some placards read "USA already has too much ICE", a reference to Trump's deployment of armed immigration officers in US cities.

The dispute occurred as a delegation of US lawmakers, led by Democratic Sen Chris Coons, visited the region for talks with Greenlandic and Danish politicians. Coons told reporters that Trump's stance was misguided and not supported by the majority of Americans.

Coons insisted there was no security threat justifying the administration's aggressive posture.

"There are legitimate reasons for us to explore ways to invest better in Arctic security broadly, both in the American Arctic and in our Nato partners and allies," Coons said.—Agencies

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